

CITY OF SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM



VISTA MEMBER HANDBOOK 2010-2011

City of Saint Paul VISTA Program / 390 City Hall / 15 West Kellogg Boulevard / Saint Paul, MN 55102

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PROGRAM STAFF & TERMINOLOGY

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TERMINOLOGY:

Sponsoring Organization: City of Saint Paul VISTA Program and staff.

Participating Site: Site where VISTA member performs service. May be referred to as the “service site.”

VISTA Supervisor: The person who provides daily supervision and guidance for the VISTA member at his or her assigned service site. May be referred to as the “on-site supervisor.”

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS): An independent federal agency created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. CNCS provides federal funds to implement AmeriCorps*VISTA and other national service programs. Each state has a state office which houses program officers who oversee program implementation and progress monitoring. May be referred to as “VISTA State Office.”

The program officer assigned to the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program is:

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AMERICORPS*VISTA

Helping Others Help Themselves

AmeriCorps*VISTA helps individuals and communities implement grassroots solutions designed to alleviate poverty. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965, the program places individuals at nonprofit, faith-based and other community organizations, and public agencies to create and expand programs that fight illiteracy, improve health services, reduce unemployment, increase housing opportunities, reduce recidivism, and expand access to technology for those living in poverty across America. VISTA members ultimately bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. Through AmeriCorps*VISTA, ordinary people provide extraordinary service in more than 1,500 projects nationwide.

AmeriCorps*VISTA members leverage human, financial, and material resources to increase the capacity of low-income communities across the country to solve their own problems. When VISTA members complete their service, they leave behind lasting solutions to some of our country's toughest problems.

Since 1965, more than 177,000 individuals have served through VISTA. Today, over 6,000 AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve throughout the country—recruiting and supporting over 500,000 community volunteers, raising over \$100 million of cash resources and over \$50 million of in-kind resources, mentoring over 6,000 children of prisoners, and helping place 6,500 people in jobs.



CITY OF SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM

Mayor Chris Coleman holds education as a top priority for his Administration. He believes that cities have a critical role in the development of young people and that the city's future economic stability and quality of life depends on our ability to connect young people to meaningful learning experiences. Mayor Coleman leads with a vision for how children should be prepared for school and for life by working in collaboration with the community to leverage city and community resources, building on the strengths of Saint Paul residents to create long lasting results. City of Saint Paul VISTA is a key initiative in his Administration's work to close the opportunity gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" children, youth and families in Saint Paul.

City of Saint Paul VISTA gives people from different backgrounds the chance to come together to make real differences in their community while gaining valuable work skills. Working full-time for one year on a range of educational issues, approximately 20 VISTA members provide support to projects in schools, City departments, and non-profits across Saint Paul that address education issues in the following areas:

1. *Expand and Enhance Early Childhood Education.* School readiness assessments in Minnesota show that only about half of kindergarten children are fully prepared to succeed in school.¹ The VISTA program seeks to expand and enhance early childhood education programs so that all children enter school ready to learn.
2. *Increase During and Out-of-School Time Learning Opportunities.* Young people spend 20% of their time in school and 80% in the out-of-school time. The VISTA Program strives to enhance formal and informal learning opportunities for Saint Paul youth by including programming during school and during the out-of-school time.
3. *Expand College Access and Preparedness.* Education is the key to obtaining a good paying job. Students from low-income backgrounds have lower post-secondary education enrollment rates than their classmates.² The VISTA Program seeks to inform and prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities.
4. *Support and Increase Workforce Training and Preparedness.* Within the next 25 years, many skilled jobs currently held by our City's Baby Boomers will become available. Reports warn that the next generation of workers, or today's students, may not be ready to fill these skilled jobs.³ The VISTA program aims to increase workforce training and preparedness opportunities to support our growing and diverse residents as well as our businesses.

2009-2010 Outcomes

During the 2009-2010 program year, City of Saint Paul VISTA members and projects delivered the following outcomes:

- Recruited and supported over 7,500 community volunteers who provided over 40,000 hours of support to young people through VISTA host sites.
- Coordinated and developed programs that prepared over 2,900 students for postsecondary educational opportunities and the workforce.
- Generated nearly \$232,350 for their host organizations in the form of grants and cash donations.
- Generated over \$64,000 in in-kind donations for their host organizations.

¹ www.melf.us

² Saint Paul Public Schools: Data Center, 2006.

³ Mind the Gap Report, Brookings Institution

VISTA MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

VISTA Member Role

VISTA members leverage human, financial and material resources to increase the capacity of communities across the United States to address issues of poverty and ultimately close the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots.”

VISTA Service Requirements

- Attend CNCS-sponsored Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) as set forth by the Corporation for National and Community Service
- Attend City of Saint Paul VISTA Program Orientation and on-site orientation as provided by participating site
- Commit to one year of full-time (approximately 40 hours per week), full immersion national service (additional employment prohibited)
- Abide by VISTA, City of Saint Paul VISTA, and service site organization policies and procedures
- Attend meetings and trainings as scheduled by CNCS, City of Saint Paul VISTA, and service site
- Perform indirect service as set forth in the VISTA Project Plan and assignment description
- Communicate with sponsoring organization and participating site staff to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of the community
- Participate in regular meetings with on-site supervisor
- Maintain records and collect data for program evaluation
- Complete and submit two VISTA evaluations during the service year
- Submit quarterly reports as well as a year-end report to City of Saint Paul VISTA
- Notify VISTA Supervisor and City of Saint Paul VISTA program staff of personal and sick leave

Activities or tasks required by City of Saint Paul VISTA, such as team meetings and trainings, supersede activities and events taking place at the VISTA's service site, unless the VISTA receives prior approval from City of Saint Paul VISTA program staff.

Commitment & Benefits

VISTA members commit to one year of service, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Typically, VISTA members serve between 35 and 45 hours per week.

During a VISTA member's service year, he or she is eligible for the following benefits:

- Up to \$550 in relocation expense reimbursement, if eligible
- Annual living allowance of \$11,232; paid in bi-weekly direct deposits of \$432.00
- Health benefits for VISTA member
- Federal student loan forbearance and interest accrual payment
- Mileage reimbursement for service-related activities on behalf of the site as well as on behalf of the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program.
- Trainings and \$150 professional development allowance
- Choice of \$5,350 education award or \$1,500 cash stipend, upon successful completion of service year
- Maximum of \$400 per month per child in child care reimbursement, if eligible
- 10 days of personal leave, 10 days of sick leave, and holidays observed by participating site, as well as 5 days of emergency leave if applicable
- Life insurance, optional

Qualifications

- Dedication to the AmeriCorps*VISTA mission
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent job or volunteer experience
- Strong organizational, computer and interpersonal skills
- U.S. citizen, National or Legal Resident
- Background screening

Limitations & Prohibited Activities

VISTA members are not employees of the City of Saint Paul or their assigned service site. Members should not displace paid staff nor should they perform such duties as photocopying, filing, running errands, or other clerical duties unless pertinent to their immediate role as a City of Saint Paul VISTA.

Members should not spend a significant portion of their time providing direct services to individual clients or community members.

VISTA members may not participate in labor organizing, lobbying, religious, or political activities while performing as a VISTA member.

VISTA members may not have additional employment during their VISTA service term. Additionally, VISTA members must receive permission from the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program before enrolling in classes, whether full- or part-time, at an educational institution.

Outside employment and/or enrollment in courses without the necessary prior approval is cause for termination.

For further clarification or to receive a full list of prohibited activities, please see your VISTA Member Handbook or you may contact City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff.

CITY OF SAINT PAUL VISTA PROGRAM STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff works to ensure that VISTA members experience success during their service year and that the VISTA projects at their service sites are supported so they have a positive impact on the community.

The City of Saint Paul VISTA Program provides the following to participating sites:

- Support and technical assistance to participating sites in the development of the VISTA Work Plan and VISTA member assignment description;
- City of Saint Paul VISTA Supervisor Orientation and meetings;
- Support and assistance to the participating site regarding member recruitment, interview, selection and approval – *final approval required from the VISTA State Office*;
- Support to on-site supervisors in administrative matters concerning project assignment, transportation, etc. City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff will be available to respond to support requests for any program-related issues;
- Supervision and tracking of the progress of participating sites;
- Support and tracking of member benefits and sick/vacation time;
- Site visits and ongoing support as needed;
- Fiscal management of federal grant; and
- Reporting as mandated by the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program's federal grant.

The City of Saint Paul VISTA Program provides the following to VISTA members:

- City of Saint Paul VISTA Orientation and other in-service VISTA trainings;
- Support and supervision to VISTA members in administrative matters concerning project assignment, transportation, etc.;
- Support regarding any program-related issues;
- Supervision and tracking of VISTA project progress;
- Tracking of VISTA member leave;
- \$150 professional development allowance;
- Payroll and other reimbursements; and
- Site visits and ongoing support as needed.

VISTA SUPERVISOR AND SERVICE SITE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Participating sites are responsible for the following:

- Develop 3-year VISTA Project Plan and performance measures, with support from City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff;
- Attend CNCS-sponsored Supervisor Training;
- Work with City of Saint Paul VISTA to recruit, interview, and select members. Final approval from CNCS is required for all VISTA positions;
- Provide on-site orientation for the VISTA member within two weeks of the VISTA's start date;
- Provide work space, phone, mailbox, computer, Internet access, e-mail account, site ID badge, and other materials necessary for the VISTA's work, comparable to that of paid staff;
- Provide regular supervision and support – may include weekly meetings, regular review of VISTA Project Plan, etc. The support a VISTA member receives from her supervisor is a key factor in her success as a VISTA and of the success of the VISTA project.
- Provide background checks for community volunteers, if applicable. If the participating site requires background checks on community volunteers, the site is responsible for completing the necessary background checks on community volunteers recruited by the VISTA member.
- Complete VISTA evaluations twice a year;
- Provide project progress monitoring;
- Work with VISTA and organization to ensure efforts are sustained beyond VISTA partnership;
- Reimburse VISTA members for service-related mileage incurred on behalf of the site and/or project plan.
- Complete quarterly reports and end-of-year report with VISTA member to be submitted to City of Saint Paul VISTA. The reports require the participating site to identify the in-kind resources dedicated to the VISTA project, such as space, supervision time, equipment, supplies, phone and Internet access; and
- Ensure VISTA member duties do not displace staff duties, are limited to indirect service, and are not political or religious in nature.

MY AMERICORPS

My AmeriCorps, <https://my.americorps.gov>, provides a one-stop-shop for AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA and NCCC members and alumni - presenting a wealth of information and frequently requested forms and services, including access to the former AmeriCorps Online Payment System features. Examples of features available include the ability for members and alumni to:

- Modify contact information (name, addresses, e-mail address)
- View and print tax statements and forms (as applicable)
- View and print pay statements (as applicable)
- Access customized letters certifying VISTA term of service with an AmeriCorps program

How is My AmeriCorps different from the AmeriCorps website?

While the AmeriCorps website provides information to the general public, My AmeriCorps is a space just for those who serve or have served. My AmeriCorps provides interactive tools and customized information for every point in the AmeriCorps experience.

If I've elected to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, what can My AmeriCorps do for me?
By logging into My AmeriCorps and clicking on "My Education Award," members and alumni can use My AmeriCorps to:

- Update your contact information
- Access, create, and submit forms to:
 - Have your student loans deferred during your term of service (Forbearance Request)
 - Request payment of the interest that accrued on your student loans during your term of service (Interest Accrual Benefit Request)
 - Request payment of qualified student loans (Education Award Payment Request)
 - Request payment of current Educational Expenses (Education Award Payment Request)
 - Extend the date of expiration of your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (Award Extension Request)
- View the status of your pending requests
- Check your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award balance
- View your account history

VISTA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The following VISTA Policies and Procedures are intended for informational purposes only. For complete VISTA Policies and Procedures, refer to the “AmeriCorps*VISTA Member Handbook” and “AmeriCorps*VISTA Supervisor’s Manual.”

MEMBER LEAVE

VISTA members receive leave during their service year as well as holidays observed by the service site organization.

Sick Leave

VISTA members receive 10 days of sick leave. Members must notify on-site supervisors as well as City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff if they are going to be absent from work for an illness.

Personal Leave

VISTA members receive 10 days of personal leave. Members must obtain prior approval for personal leave. Requests must be approved by the on-site supervisor and City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff.

Emergency Leave

City of Saint Paul VISTA and CNCS may grant VISTA members up to one week of emergency leave if an immediate family member (spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandparent, or guardian) becomes critically ill or dies. Any additional time away from the project requires the approval of the Corporation State Program Director. Emergency leave does not count against the member’s personal leave time.

If circumstances require the member to take emergency leave, the member should notify the on-site supervisor and City of Saint Paul VISTA staff at once, and if requested, provide evidence of the emergency. On-site supervisors are expected to work with City of Saint Paul VISTA staff to ensure the correct process for these circumstances.

Leave Policies

Under AmeriCorps*VISTA provisions, leave is normally not granted during the first three months or during the last month of service.

During leave, all regular member benefits continue. CNCS pays no travel expenses for leave. VISTA members enjoy whatever national holidays are recognized by their service site; however, they do not receive federal holidays that are not recognized by their service site.

If the service site organization provides its staff additional “floating holidays,” “spring breaks,” “summer recesses,” etc., members are expected to continue their service unless authorized to take the time off as part of their VISTA leave.

City of St. Paul VISTA staff must be notified of all usage of sick and personal time.

SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES

City of Saint Paul VISTA members with accounts on social networking web sites must abide by the following guidelines during their year of service:

Representing VISTA

The role of a City of Saint Paul VISTA is three-fold; a VISTA represents AmeriCorps*VISTA, the service site, and the Saint Paul Mayor's Office. It is important to always be mindful of what VISTA represents and how postings may be viewed by others in the community and social networks. Postings that might jeopardize the character of these entities in any way must be strictly avoided.

Professionalism

Most social networking web sites are not fully private. As such, only post photos or comments that would be appropriate for professional colleagues or prospective employers to view.

Posting Photographs

Sharing photos on social networking sites can be a great way to share memories of the VISTA year. However, posted photos should not include individuals who a) do not wish to be posted on the site or b) are under the age of 18 and do not have permission to be posted on the site, such as children or students from a VISTA service site.

CONTINUATION OF SERVICE

It is at the discretion of the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program and the Corporation for National and Community Service to afford the opportunity of VISTA service beyond the initial year of enrollment.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

Discriminatory Behavior

Discriminatory behavior includes inappropriate remarks about or conduct related to an employee's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, disability, sex, marital status, age, sexual orientation, or status with regard to public assistance. Violent behavior includes the use of physical force, harassment, intimidation, or abuse of power or authority when the impact is used to control by causing pain, fear or hurt. Violent behavior also includes verbal abuse and/or acts, words, comments, or conditions that would lead a person to reasonably believe a violent act could occur. Harassment includes words or conduct that is severe or pervasive, and that a reasonable person would find abusive. Behavior prohibited by this policy also includes requests to engage in illegal, immoral or unethical conduct, or retaliation for making a complaint under this policy. *(All behaviors prohibited by this policy have not been explicitly covered herein. The definitions used are for illustrative purposes and are not meant to be all inclusive.)*

Sexual Harassment

One specific kind of discriminatory and offensive behavior is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, which can consist of a wide range of unwanted and unwelcome sexually-directed behavior, is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. Submitting to the conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or of obtaining public services;
2. Submitting to or rejecting the conduct is used as the basis for an employment decision affecting an individual's employment or the delivery of public services; or
3. Such conduct has the purpose or result of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or public service environment.

Behavior prohibited by this policy can include unwelcome sexual remarks or compliments, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo or propositions, sexually-suggestive facial expressions, kissing, touching, and sexual contact.

Any person who feels he or she is being subjected to discriminatory, violent, or offensive behavior of any kind may feel free to object to the behavior and shall report the behavior to their supervisor. In the case of violent behavior, the incident needs to be reported immediately after the incident.

Additional Employment and Educational Enrollment

Because AmeriCorps*VISTA is a full immersion experience requiring its members to be able to attend community meetings and dedicate themselves to understanding and serving the community to which they are assigned, VISTA members may not have additional employment during their VISTA service term. Additionally, VISTA members must receive permission from the City of Saint Paul VISTA Program before enrolling in classes, whether full- or part-time, at an educational institution.

Outside employment and/or enrollment in courses without the necessary prior approval is cause for termination.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE POLICY

Drug-related Offenses on AmeriCorps*VISTA City of Saint Paul VISTA Property: Pursuant to the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988, VISTAs are prohibited from unlawfully manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, possessing or using a controlled substance in the workplace. As further required under the Drug-Free Workplace Act, a VISTA, as a condition of employment, must notify City of Saint Paul VISTA Program staff if she or he is convicted of any criminal drug statute violation no later than five days after the conviction.

Alcoholic Beverages on AmeriCorps*VISTA Property: Consumption of alcoholic beverages on City of Saint Paul VISTA and City of Saint Paul VISTA participating site's property is prohibited except at City of Saint Paul VISTA and participating site-sponsored social events.

Drug and Alcohol Use Off AmeriCorps*VISTA City of Saint Paul VISTA Property: Unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance, and excessive use of alcohol, that may adversely affect a VISTA's job performance, or that may reflect unfavorably upon public or governmental confidence in the manner in which City of Saint Paul VISTA carries out its activities, is prohibited.

Disciplinary Action: Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination as outlined by CNCS provisions.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If a circumstance arises during your service that directly affects your service situation or that you believe violates regulations governing the terms and conditions of service, resulting in a denial or infringement of a right or benefit to you, you may file a grievance. City of Saint Paul VISTA members follow the member grievance procedure referenced in your VISTA Member Handbook and reprinted in full in the Member Handbook Appendix.

GROUND FOR MEMBER TERMINATION

CNCS may terminate or suspend a VISTA member based on conduct (for cause or termination) for the following reasons:

- Conviction of a criminal offense under federal, state, or local statute or ordinance;

- Violation of any provision of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended, or a Corporation regulation, policy, or guideline;
- Failure, refusal, or inability to perform prescribed project duties as outlined in the project application and/or assignment description and as directed by the Sponsoring Organization to which you are assigned;
- Involvement in activities that substantially interfere with your performance of project duties;
- Intentional false statement, omission, fraud, or deception in obtaining selection as a member;
- Any conduct on your part that substantially diminishes your effectiveness as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member including skipping mandatory training sessions at state, cluster or national training events; or
- Unsatisfactory performance of assignment.